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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Legião de Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. The fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) offers a timely opportunity to consider the many challenges today's women face in obtaining equal treatment throughout the world. In particular, the conference seeks to address the unequal proportions of women in education and in the workforce, and the particular discrimination women face when attempting to learn about or work in the sectors of science and technology. In a sense, then, the problems addressed by this year's CSW can be summarized as a problem of education; for it is often the discrimination women face in their pursuit of education that allows later prejudice in employment to persist.

2. Today, the international community lags behind the pace it envisioned when it made eradicating gender inequality in education part of its eight Millennium Development Goals at the historic Millennium Summit of 2000. This year's CSW session offers a propitious opportunity to reconsider how best to achieve this goal — an opportunity to re-evaluate old strategies, and to propose new ones. As a means of divining a more efficacious solution to the problem of gender inequality in education, this statement presents the successes enjoyed by Legião de Boa Vontade (a Brazilian non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council) in the field of women's education, and then reframes the organization's strategies as a means of closing the global inequality gap in education. In so doing, it proposes a model not only for the creation of equal opportunity in the labour force, but also for the development of permanent long-term solutions to global crises.

3. In its recent *Global Education Digest* (published in September of 2010), UNESCO and its Institute for Statistics (UIS) highlighted some worrisome educational trends. Most alarming of all, the *Digest* noted that 63 out of the 157 countries it surveyed — fully 40 per cent — are considered to be far away from achieving the goal of eradicating gender inequality in education by 2015, assuming present trends continue.

4. As the *Digest* points out, much work remains to be done in order to achieve the goal of educational parity between genders. And unfortunately, even those gains that have been made in the struggle to reduce gender inequality in education risk being wiped out as the world struggles with a flagging global economy and other concerns. But in spite of these crises, it is critical that the world — Governments, civil society and international agencies alike — continues to make progress in educational policy. Education (and especially the education of women and girls) is a central part of any strategy that would resolve the issues currently troubling the world. As crises arise, budgets and expenditures will shift; but education must remain a constant priority in order to ensure the arrival of the permanent solutions that only a more educated populace can produce.

5. The importance of a quality education, and the necessity of making such an education available to all who would seek it, is a concept Legião de Boa Vontade has embraced for decades. It is hoped that a brief examination of the pedagogical practices and philosophies of the organization will be a useful part of the exchange of ideas that, now more than ever, must lead to parity in educational opportunity. As

* Issued without formal editing.

an internationally recognized social, educational and humanitarian organization with operations in seven countries (Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Paraguay, Uruguay, Portugal and the United States of America) and with a more than 60-year history of enacting positive change, Legião de Boa Vontade has much to offer in conversations about policy. And with women the direct beneficiaries of nearly 85 per cent of the more than 8 million services the organization performs annually, it is clear that the advancement of women is a top priority for the organization.

6. At the heart of nearly every Legião de Boa Vontade programme is a belief in the transformative power of education. Whether offering job training to the unemployed, teaching pregnant women how to prepare for motherhood, or providing fun and educational activities dedicated to fostering the culture of peace in local youths, the organization believes strongly that learning is the answer to the many challenges life presents; and it emphasizes that belief throughout its numerous schools and preschools, shelters and community centres. Material assistance can be a significant part of helping to resolve global problems, and the organization does oversee several programmes (like its annual Christmas campaign, which last year gave away more than 1,200 tons of food to needy families) that distribute essential goods to communities in need. But while the provision of material goods can often treat the symptoms of diseases like hunger or poverty, only education can offer a permanent cure.

7. Legião de Boa Vontade believes strongly that the hope for a universally educated world rests on the equal inclusion of women in the process of education, and on the natural transfer of that education from women to their families. As the famous nineteenth century North American educator Charles McIver once wrote: "When you educate a man, you educate an individual; when you educate a woman, you educate an entire family". For this reason, any analysis of the educational practices and strategies of Legião de Boa Vontade must necessarily include a brief explanation of the Baby Citizen programme. As part of the Baby Citizen programme, pregnant women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are provided multidisciplinary care and education as they travel the path towards motherhood. They are given medical attention and educated about the physical implications of pregnancy and childbirth, but they are also provided important psychological care and support. And, in keeping with the goal of providing all-encompassing care, they are also assisted in developing the core values — love, solidarity, compassion, and others — that will help them as mothers and that they can instil in their children from the beginning.

8. This last component is especially critical in understanding the educational philosophy of Legião de Boa Vontade. For in the Baby Citizen programme, as in every programme offered by the organization, acquiring and developing values and emotional intelligence is just as important as learning factual knowledge. The actions of the organization are rooted in a core belief in what the organization calls ecumenical spirituality — a philosophy exemplified by the New Commandment of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). In the philosophy of ecumenical spirituality, love is the essential conduit for channelling knowledge to do good.

9. The Baby Citizen programme is one example of the commitment of Legião de Boa Vontade to offering a multidisciplinary education, but there are many others.

Throughout the world, the organization runs a number of primary, secondary and pre-primary schools. These schools — provided free of charge and free of any sort of gender bias, academic or otherwise — combine excellent classroom education with a number of additional services that unite to create a complete and all-encompassing educational experience. On-staff medical professionals ensure that student health is properly looked after, while available psychologists provide critical emotional care. The organization's schools even employ social workers to work with the families of their students to help overcome challenges like poverty and unemployment.

10. In addition to their unique, multifaceted approach to education, schools and preschools of Legião de Boa Vontade are also distinguished by their embrace of a philosophy called the pedagogy of affection. Developed by organization president José de Paiva Netto, the pedagogy of affection stresses the need for universal love in the learning process, and the importance of play as an essential component in the education of young children. The importance and success of the pedagogy of affection cannot be overestimated: although many of the organization's schools operate in areas scarred by violence, there are no instances of violence involving its students, who have learned from an early age the value of feeling and expressing fraternal love. Well-schooled in academic subjects and reared in the loving and nurturing environment created by the pedagogy of affection, students grow up to become productive and compassionate members of society (as is evidenced by the striking number of former students who return to the organization as caregivers and professional resources later in life).

11. For those who do not have the opportunity to mature under the pedagogy of affection from the beginning, Legião de Boa Vontade and its President Paiva Netto have developed the similar ecumenical citizen pedagogy. Much like the pedagogy of affection, the ecumenical citizen pedagogy is designed to instil and encourage core values like fraternal love, solidarity and compassion; but it is intended to help those who already have considerable life experience as opposed to those who are learning and experiencing life for the first time. In a way, then, the ecumenical citizen pedagogy is a kind of second education. Its goal is to help adults and older youths (both men and women) discover within themselves the core values so essential to the mission of Legião de Boa Vontade — values that have sometimes lain dormant or neglected. Thanks to the ecumenical citizen pedagogy, the organization has helped thousands to transcend difficult situations (ranging from situations of domestic abuse, to unemployment and poverty, to depression and suicidal impulses) and redefine their lives based on the ideals of love, compassion and fairness.

12. The ecumenical citizen pedagogy has been adopted throughout the world at Legião de Boa Vontade shelters, community centres and schools. It is paired with more practical education, such as job training seminars and language classes, to provide those who seek help (especially women) with a multidisciplinary education that contains both pragmatic and philosophical teachings. In this way it reflects the organization's overall commitment to providing not just material assistance, but also spiritual, psychological and emotional tools for establishing better, more sustainable lives.

13. The implications of the experiences of Legião de Boa Vontade are significant, and have tremendous relevance to the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women. It is clear that education must continue to be a top priority when

world policy decisions are made. And the best practices of Legião de Boa Vontade suggest that a broader notion of education is needed — a definition that includes not just academic rigour but also teachings grounded in essential human values and spirituality. And of course, this new brand of education must be made available to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, economic situation, or any other form of discrimination. In order for education to achieve its full potential, women and girls must be able to reap its benefits just as much as their male counterparts; for it is women and girls who have always been and will continue to be the agents of educational dissemination, the teachers of their families.

14. The educational policies of Legião de Boa Vontade have shown the tremendous power for good that can be created when women are provided equal access to all forms of classroom education and job training, along with spiritual, values-based teachings. It is hoped that the success of these policies will encourage a more widespread shift towards the kind of comprehensive educational philosophy that is so essential to the world's future. In the words of Legião President Paiva Netto: "Take care of the Spirit, reform the human being. And everything will transform itself".